THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) Yes, India and France have finalised and signed the Agreement on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters and in Civil Matters. However, no Agreement on exchange of foreign prisoners between India and France has been finalised.

(b) Agreement on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters and in Civil Matters were signed between India and France on 25.01.1998 during the visit of the French President to India. Both the Agreements will become operative after the completion of internal process from both sides.

Ministry of Home Affairs has introduced an enabling legislation to permit exchange of foreign prisoners and it is under the consideration of the Parliament. Only after the enactment of the enabling legislation, the Government of India can enter into negotiation with France for an Agreement on exchange of foreign prisoners.

(c) Yes.

(d) The Hon'ble Deputy Prime Minister signed the Extradition Treaty with France on January 24, 2003 in Paris. The Treaty will come into force after the exchange of instruments of ratification.

Separate Ministry for NRIs

†2387. SHRIMATI KUM KUM RAI:
SHRI MOTILAL VORA:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that a demand for constituting a separate Ministry is being made for solving the problems of Non-Resident Indians and for providing a boost to their contribution for development of the country;

(b) if so, Government's reaction thereto; and

(c) by when a final decision is likely to be taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) to (c) The High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora which submitted its Report to the Government in December, 2001 had wide ranging consultations with every segment of

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

the overseas Indian Community. The most fervent plea made by the Indian Diaspora was to provide for a single-window mechanism for its interaction with India. The High Level Committee in its Report recommended the setting up of an autonomous and empowered body structured along the line of the Planning Commission to deal with matters pertaining to the Indian Diaspora. The Government has not taken any decision in the matter.

TRI-lateral Conference

2388. SHRI K.B. KRISHNA MURTHY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether India had refrained from formal participation in the recently held Track-II Tri-lateral Conference of the top military/intelligence/security experts from U.S., Israel and India;

(b) whether the Conference held in India deliberated on the security, military and defence co-operation among the three countries; and

(c) whether the Conference was attended by any serving army officers and others; if so, details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) Yes, Track II dialogue, by definition, involves participation of experts outside the government.

(b) It is reported that the conference discussed a number of issues, including potential for cooperation between India, the United States and Israel on security matters.

(c) Track II Conference do not have official participation.

Delay in issuance of passports in Rajasthan

2389. SHRI AIMADUDDIN AHMED KHAN (DURRU): Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether there are reports of inordinate delay in issuance of passports in Rajasthan;

(b) if so, the number of passports issued to the applicants in the State during the last three years and as on date, year-wise;